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Toch and *alsnog* in young speakers' colloquial Dutch

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1 *Still*

The English adverb *still* exemplifies two apparently infrequent grammaticalization processes.¹ Starting out as an adjective meaning 'immobile' (cf. Dutch *stil*, German *stille*; the acoustic meaning 'silent' is an early extension of the postural meaning), it first assumed the function of an aspectual adverb indicating continuation (1a), perhaps beyond an expected point. From there it developed into an adversative coordination marker (1b), entering into competition with *yet* and a range of other expressions such as *after all* (see Poutsma, 1929, 593f).²

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¹This is based on the extensive survey in Heine and Kuteva (2002). For the aspectual adverb STILL, Heine and Kuteva identify two sources: an iterative/repetitive marker (p. 184) and a temporal marker ('now', p. 218). The latter is also relevant for Dutch. For the development of adversative markers, Heine and Kuteva (p. 291) point to the relevance of temporal markers (which they suspect is more widespread than can currently be ascertained), but English and young speakers' Dutch suggest that aspectual markers may be relevant as well.

²For the chronology I assume that the information in the Online Etymological Dictionary (Harper 2014, accessed April 8, 2015) is correct. This has the adverbial reading starting ca. 1530, and the adversative reading ca. 1722.

- (1) a. He is **still** young.
 b. He's an asshole, but I **still** kind of like him.

Both shifts are not attested in the other West-Germanic languages. In Dutch, the aspectual continuative adverb is *nog* (2a), derived from a root meaning 'now' and a coordinative suffix (Philippa 2007, s.l. *nog*; see also note 1). The adversative marker is *toch* (originally *doch*; see Daalder 1986, Foolen 2006, (2b)).

- (2) a. *Hij is **nog** jong.* (Dutch)
 he is NOG young
 'He is still young.'
 b. *Hij is een klootzak, maar ik vind hem **toch** wel aardig.*
 he is a scrotum but I find him TOCH AFF nice
 'He's an asshole, but I still kind of like him.'

Strikingly, however, we find that young speakers of Dutch currently use a marked variant of *nog*, *alsnóg* (the accent indicating high pitch), instead of adversative *toch*:³

- (3) *Hij is een klootzak, maar ik vind hem **alsnóg** wel aardig.*
 he is a scrotum but I find him ALSNOG AFF nice
 'He is an asshole, but I still kind of like him.'

The purpose of this squib is to explain the appearance of *alsnóg* for *toch* in young speakers' Dutch as an instance of the same kind of conceptual shift that gave rise to adversative *still* in English.

2 *Alsnóg*

Dutch *alsnóg* is originally an emphatic form of *nog* (WNT, 2007, s.l. *als-nog*), hence the high pitch on *nog*. *Nog* and *alsnóg* no longer share the

³Signaled by Jacomine Nortier in 2012, witness Van Oostendorp (2012), and independently in 2014 by a 25 year-old blogger (Audrey, 2014). In combination with *heel* 'very' (used to limit search results), adversative *alsnóg* is first attested on Twitter in September 2009. See Van Oostendorp (2012) and the Appendix for a selection of online attestations of adversative *alsnóg*.

same distribution (cf. (4) and (2a)):⁴

- (4) **Hij is alsnóg jong.*
 he is ALSNOG young
 (intended) 'He is still young.'

Alsnóg in its generally accepted use is illustrated in (5).

- (5) *Als je vergeten bent je verslag in te leveren*
 if you forget:PART be:2SG your report in to hand:INF
kun je dat tot 15 juni alsnóg doen.
 can:2SG.INV you that until June 15 ALSNOG do:INF
 'If you forgot to hand in your report, you can still do so until June 15.'

Alsnóg in (5) gives the clause what I would like to call a 'second chance'-reading: the implication is that the original deadline for handing in the report was missed, but that the report can still be handed in in spite of that ('June 15' specifying an extended deadline).

This 'second chance'-reading is absent when *nog* is used. Thus, we get the minimal pair in (6).

- (6) a. *Je kunt het nog inleveren.*
 you can:2SG it NOG hand.in:INF
 'You can still hand it in [i.e. the deadline has not passed].'
 b. *Je kunt het alsnóg inleveren.*
 you can:2SG it ALSNOG hand.in:INF
 'You can still hand it in [even though the deadline has passed].'

There is a clear element of unexpectedness to the 'second chance'-reading: not meeting a deadline would normally eliminate the possibility of handing in the report. We can use this element of unexpectedness to define the distinction between *nog* and *alsnóg*.

Aspectual particles like *nog* (and its counterpart *al* 'already') relate to the flow of time (see Vandeweghe, 1992). They can only be used fe-

⁴WNT (2007, s.l. *alsnog*) lists examples from the early 19th century where *nog* and *alsnog* still show the same distribution.

licitously in the context of a polarity transition (i.e. a transition from a positive to a negative state, or vice versa). In (2a), the transition (a point on the time axis) is from ‘young’ to ‘not young’, and since we said that the subject is young, his position on the time axis must be before the polarity transition point. Consider now the contribution that *nog* makes:

- (7) a. *Hij is jong.*
 he is young
 b. *Hij is **nog** jong.*
 he is NOG young
 ‘He is still young.’

In (7a), the polarity transition point is implied by the semantics of the predicate *jong* ‘young’; we know that youth is temporary. But the impending polarity transition is not asserted; this is what is accomplished in (7b) by adding *nog*.⁵

It is tempting to describe the contribution of *nog* as ‘prospective’, i.e. as asserting that the polarity transition point lies ahead. Alternatively, *nog* merely asserts the relevance of the transition point, and its use implies that the transition point has not yet been passed.⁶ In other words, the polarity state that holds prior to the transition point continues, perhaps longer than expected.⁷

⁵That the polarity transition is asserted can be shown in the following dialogue:

- (i) A: *Hij is jong.*
 he is young
 ‘He is young.’
 B: *Nog wel.*
 NOG AFF
 ‘Still.’

The sole contribution of B’s turn is to add the existence of the polarity transition. (See also Vandeweghe, 1992, p. 99).

⁶The prospective semantics of *nog* is highlighted in Vandeweghe (1992, p. 99), but the alternative definition in terms of continued duration of the existing state can also be found there.

⁷Thus Heine and Kuteva (2002, p. 184).

This counter-expectational element is targeted by the emphatic variant *alsnóg*. In (6), the polarity transition is from 'possible to hand in' to 'not possible to hand in', and the deadline marks the polarity transition point. (6a), with *nog*, asserts the existence of a deadline, and implies that the deadline has not passed. In contrast, (6b), with *alsnóg*, implies that the deadline has passed and asserts that the (new) polarity transition point still lies ahead. This contradiction (the subject finds itself between deadlines) is what gives rise to the 'second chance'-effect.⁸

Alsnóg, then, assumes a reading 'later than expected', 'too late, strictly speaking', and, hence, 'against all expectations'. We find this reading also in the examples in (8), where no polarity transition is asserted.

- (8) a. *Alles leek uitgepraat, maar toen heeft hij het alsnóg*
all seemed out.talk:PART but then has he it ALSNOG
uitgemaakt.
out.make:PART
'It seemed we patched things up, but then he broke up with
me after all.'
- b. *Hij heeft na zijn pensioen alsnóg zijn rijbewijs*
he has after his retirement ALSNOG his driver's.license
gehaald.
get:PART
'After his retirement he got his driver's license after all.'

In these cases, the event being reported (the break-up, getting one's driver's license) simply takes place later than it should have. If you want to break up, the natural moment is before patching things up; if you want to get your driver's license, it is much more expedient to do so early on.

3 *Toch*

Toch is notoriously polysemous (Elffers, 1992; Foolen, 1994; Snel, 2011), dictionaries typically listing around ten different uses. I believe these may

⁸The reason that (4) is ungrammatical must now be related to the circumstance that the transition from 'young' to 'no longer young' is irrevocable.

be grouped into the following four core meanings:

- (9) *Toch*
1. corrective
 2. adversative
 3. justificatory
 4. appellative

The *corrective* use finds its origin as a dialogue particle (similar to the German cognate *doch*, cf. Foolen 2006, p. 62), with presupposition-canceling impact. In present day Dutch, this use requires strengthening by affirmative *wel* or negative *niet*:

- (10) A: *Ben je niet blij?*
 be:2SG.INV you not glad
 ‘Aren’t you glad?’
 B: *Ja, **toch** *(wel).*
 yes TOCH aff
 ‘Yes, I am.’

We find corrective *toch* in the somewhat stilted expression *zo niet, dan toch* ‘if not, then still’ (11) and in the Flemish use of *toch* ‘at least’ discussed in Foolen (2006, pp. 63-63).

- (11) *De uitkomst was zo niet tragisch, dan **toch** ongelukkig.*
 the outcome was so not tragic then TOCH unfortunate
 ‘The outcome was, if not tragic, then still unfortunate.’

The *adversative* use of *toch* seems a natural extension of the corrective use. In its original use, illustrated in (2b), it serves to strengthen the adversative coordinator *maar* ‘but’ (WNT, 2007, s.l. *toch*). We also find the *maar toch* combination in elliptical contexts, where English uses *yet*:

- (12) *Zijn liedje was kort maar **toch** goed.*
 his song:DIM was short but TOCH good
 ‘His song was short yet good.’

In discussions, (13) is a very common turn of phrase to express that one sticks to one's conclusion, in spite of the validity of the opponent's counterarguments.

- (13) *Maar **toch**!*
but TOCH
'Even so!'

Used on its own, as in (14), adversative *toch* counters expectation, but unlike corrective *toch*, adversative *toch* must be high pitched (marked by the accent).

- (14) *Hé, je bent er **toch**!*
SURPRISE you be:2SG there TOCH
'Hey, you are here after all!'

Adversative *toch* is very natural in the first sentence position:

- (15) ***Toch** vind ik hem wel aardig.*
TOCH find I him AFF nice
'Still, I kind of like him.'

The *justificatory* use of *toch* is illustrated in (16).

- (16) *Nu ik hier **toch** ben, kan ik nog wel even blijven.*
now I here TOCH be:1SG can:1SG I still AFF a.while stay:INF
'Now that I'm here anyway, I might as well stay a while.'

As explained in Foolen (2006, p. 69), this use of *toch* serves to justify an action (in this case, staying a while) that might otherwise be considered objectionable. The pitch on *toch* must be high. There seems to be a connection with the adversative use of *toch*, in the sense that the situation described in the clause containing *toch* is presented as unwanted.

Finally, the *appellative* use of *toch* subsumes the uses of *toch* as a modal particle described in Foolen (2006, pp. 66-68) as facilitating the various speech acts in which *toch* occurs. These can be imperative (17), declarative, appealing for agreement (18), exclamative (19), or interrogative (20).

- (17) *Hou **toch** eens op met je gezeur!*
 hold:IMP TOCH once PRT with your whining
 ‘Oh, stop whining already!’ (ophouden [lit. uphold] = stop)
- (18) *We kunnen **toch** ook thuis blijven.*
 we can:PL TOCH also home stay:INF
 ‘We can also stay home, can’t we?’
- (19) *Wat is hij **toch** een loser!*
 what is he TOCH a loser
 ‘He’s such a loser!’
- (20) *Wat hoor ik **toch** de hele tijd?*
 what hear:1SG I TOCH the whole time
 ‘What’s that I’m hearing all the time?’

In the appellative/modal use, *toch* cannot have high pitch.

4 *Alsnóg* for *toch*

As illustrated in (3), young speakers of Dutch can use *alsnóg* for *toch*. This replacement of *toch* by *alsnóg* appears to be very recent. Casual observation suggests that the oldest speakers accepting (3) are in their twenties. Among young teenagers, (3) is very normal, although (2b), with *toch* instead of *alsnóg*, is also accepted.

I tested young Dutch speakers’ intuitions on the use of *alsnóg* for *toch* in its four meanings (see section 3), and found that *alsnóg* can be replaced by *toch* only in the adversative reading. The following examples illustrate the use of *toch/alsnóg* in the relevant test sentences.

- (21) a. *corrective*
- A: *Ben je niet blij?*
 be:2SG.INV you not glad
 ‘Aren’t you glad?’
- B: **Ja, **alsnóg** wel.*
 yes ALSNOG aff
 (intended) ‘Yes, I am.’

- b. *adversative* (see also (3))

Hé, je bent er alsnóg!

SURPRISE you be:2SG there ALSNOG

'Hey, you're here after all!'

- c. *justificatory*

**Nu ik hier alsnóg ben (kan ik nog wel even blijven)*

now I here ALSNOG be:1SG

(intended) 'Now that I'm here anyway, I might as well stay a while.'

- d. *appellative*

**We kunnen alsnóg ook thuis blijven.*

we can:PL ALSNOG also home stay:INF

(intended) 'We can also stay home, can't we?'

The speakers I tested could not use *alsnóg* for any of the appellative uses of *toch*, and were consistent in their use of *alsnóg* in the adversative uses of *toch*.

We can illustrate the adversative/appellative contrast once more with the minimal pair in (22), where the adversative (22a) differs from appellative (22b) only in pitch accent:

- (22) a. *Maar tóch!* (*adversative*) (= (13))

but TOCH

'Even so!'

- b. *Máár toch!* (*exclamative*)

but TOCH

'My, my!'

As expected, young speakers can replace *toch* by *alsnóg* in (23a), but not in (23b):

- (23) a. *Maar alsnóg!* (*adversative*)

but ALSNOG

'Even so!'

- b. **Máár **alsnog**!* (exclamative)
but ALSNOG
(intended) ‘My, my!’

How can we explain the encroachment of *alsnóg* on adversative *toch*?

I think we can rule out the possibility that this feature of young speakers’ Dutch reflects the generalization of a dialect pattern. The *toch-alsnóg* shift is not noted in the dialectological literature, as far as I know, and dialectgeographic research has not brought out any incipient adversative *alsnóg* use.⁹

This suggests that the observed use of *alsnóg* is truly an innovation, a grammaticalization pattern to be explained by the features of *toch* and *alsnóg* within the system of grammar.

5 Grammaticalization

We saw in section 2 that standard Dutch *alsnóg* has developed from an emphatic variant of *nog* (cf. (6)) into a counter-expectation marker with a temporal dimension (‘later than expected’, cf. (8)). As a counter-expectation marker, it is in free variation with *tóch* *nog*:

- (24) a. *Hij heeft het **alsnóg** uitgemaakt.*
he has it ALSNOG out.make:PART
‘He broke up with me after all.’
b. *Hij heeft het **tóch** **nog** uitgemaakt.*
he has it TOCH nog out.make:PART
‘He broke up with me after all.’

In (24b), *toch* is used in its adversative sense, and *nog* provides the temporal dimension.

To get from standard Dutch *alsnóg* to young speakers’ Dutch *alsnóg*, we only need to suppress the temporal dimension, leaving us with a pure

⁹Adversative *toch* occurs in test sentence 90 (our (12)) of Blankaert and Pée (1925-1982), but I have not found any locations where *toch* was rendered as *alsnog*. Note that blogger Audrey (note 3) is from Limburg, while Jacomine Nortier observed the same phenomenon in Utrecht and I in Groningen.

counter-expectation marker. This is illustrated in (25).¹⁰

- (25) a. standard Dutch: *alsnog* = *tóch nog*
b. young speakers' Dutch: *alsnog* = *tóch (nog)*

This suppression of the temporal dimension, it seems to me, is exactly what characterizes the shift in English *still* from an aspectual adverb to an adversative marker (examples repeated here).

- (1) a. He is **still** young.
b. He's an asshole, but I **still** kind of like him.

Like Dutch *nog*, English *still* expresses the continued duration of a polarity state, perhaps beyond an expected point (Heine & Kuteva, 2002, p. 184). Adversative *still* loses the temporal dimension, while retaining the counter-expectational element.

If this is correct, the grammaticalization process giving rise to young speakers' use of *alsnog* for *tóch* is consistent with the generalization of IJbema (2001, p. 23) according to which grammaticalization invariably involves an upward shift in the hierarchy of functional categories. This refers to the hierarchy of functional categories (typically realized by adverbs, but also by verbal affixes or auxiliaries) proposed in Cinque (1999).

As Cinque's hierarchy correlates with linear order, such that functional categories higher in the hierarchy will be realized by functional elements appearing further to the left, we can derive the relative hierarchy of adverbial categories from word order.

Still ('continuative aspect') is a relatively low functional element in Cinque's hierarchy, following all mood, modal, and tense categories. We expect the modal element *still* ('counterexpectational modality') to appear higher, and if the parallel holds, we expect the development from *alsnog* ('continuative aspect') to *tóch* ('counterexpectational modality') in Dutch to represent the expected upward grammaticalization shift.¹¹

¹⁰Young speakers of Dutch who use *alsnog* for *toch* also retain the standard Dutch use of *alsnog* = *tóch nog*.

¹¹Cinque (1999) does not include the element of counterexpectational modality in his functional hierarchy.

We see the relative order of *tóch* and *nog* in (24b), giving us *tóch* > *nog*. *Nog* seems to appear further to the left than *alsnóg* (*nog* > *alsnóg*):

- (26) *Je kunt het **nog** tot 15 juni **alsnóg** inleveren.*
 you can:2SG it NOG until June 15 ALSNOG hand.in:INF
 ‘You can still hand it in until June 15.’

This predicts the order *tóch* > *alsnóg*, correctly:

- (27) a. *Hij heeft het **tóch** **alsnóg** gedaan.*
 het has it TOCH ALSNOG do:PART
 ‘He still did it after all.’
 b. **Hij heeft het **alsnóg** **tóch** gedaan.*
 het has it ALSNOG TOCH do:PART
- (28) a. *de **tóch** **alsnóg** getrouwde verstokte vrijgezel*
 the TOCH ALSNOG married [idiomatic] bachelor
 ‘the confirmed bachelor who got married after all.’
 b. **de **alsnóg** **tóch** getrouwde verstokte vrijgezel*
 the ALSNOG TOCH married [idiomatic] bachelor

It follows that the shift from *alsnóg* to *tóch* has the expected upward directionality.

Justificatory and appellative *toch* appear to be higher still on the functional hierarchy (although judgments are understandably hard to get):¹²

- (29) a. ?*Nu je **tóch** **tóch** hier bent, ...*
 now you toch_{JUST} toch_{ADV} here be:2sg
 ‘Now that you are here here after all anyway, ...’
 b. **Nu je **tóch** **tóch** hier bent, ...*
 now you TOCH_{ADV} TOCH_{JUST} here be:2SG
- (30) a. ?*Doe **toch** **tóch** een poging*
 do:IMP TOCH_{APP} TOCH_{ADV} a attempt
 ‘Please try anyway.’

¹²To distinguish justificatory from adversative *toch*, note that the pitch on adversative *toch* is higher than the pitch on justificatory *toch*.

- b. *Doe **tóch** **toch** *een poging*
do:IMP TOCH_{ADV} TOCH_{APP} a attempt

If so, and if IJbema's generalization holds, it would require a further shift along the grammaticalization chain for young speakers of Dutch to start using *alsnóg* for *toch* in all its uses.

6 So

In conclusion, it seems that one of the two infrequent grammaticalization shifts observed in English *still* is at least partially present in the colloquial Dutch of early 21st-century young speakers. This shift, which is consistent with generative approaches to grammaticalization, is facilitated by the circumstance that Dutch, other than English, has developed an emphatic variant (*alsnóg*) of the continuative aspectual adverb *nog* 'still'. As in English, the grammaticalization pattern requires the suppression of temporal/aspectual semantics, resulting in a pure counterexpectational modality marker.

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7 Appendix

Some online attestations of adversative *alsnóg*, retrieved April 11, 2015.

- (1) *Een vrije dag en alsnog heel veel dingen te doen.*
(‘A day off but still lots of things to do.’)
https://twitter.com/_LeonieT_/status/4025636146 (posted September 16, 2009)
- (2) *De foto's, hoewel erg fraai, vielen helaas niet in de prijzen. Pas deze maand is door een Nederlandse neteldierenexpert vastgesteld dat het alsnog zeer bijzondere foto's zijn.*
(‘The pictures, though very beautiful, did not win any awards. It wasn't until this month that a Dutch expert on polyps determined that these are very special pictures after all.’)
<http://www.natuurbericht.nl/?id=5251> (posted November 27, 2010)
- (3) *Een bronzen plak is alsnog zeer knap in dit zware veld.*
(‘A bronze medal in this tough field is still excellent.’)
<http://www.roeined.nl/2014/06/02/blikkenregen-belgrado/> (posted June 2, 2014)
- (4) *Wie fit wil worden kan alsnog heel erg lekker eten!*
(‘Who wants to get in shape can still eat excellent food.’)
<https://twitter.com/CatMaaike/status/571251007499468800> (posted February 27, 2015)
- (5) *Trommelinhoud van maar liefst 9kg. Alsnog zeer energiezuinig.*
(‘Drum capacity of no less than 9kg. Still very energy efficient.’)
<http://www.wassen.nl/wasmachines/beste-wasmachine/> (posted February 2015)
- (6) *Ook al draag je niet elke dag een pak, dan zijn de derbies alsnog zeer essentieel in je schoenencollectie.*
(‘Even though you won't wear a suit every day, the derbies are still quite essential to your shoe collection.’)
<http://www.manners.nl/manners-essentials-de-5-schoenen-die-je-moet-hebben/> (posted April 7, 2015)